



## Looking Out My Window, January 21, 2022

Someone once said that to love another means to live with and love their story. That would seem to hold true in marriages, friendships, and church relationships. We dance together in the church community, learning more about each other and our individual stories. Meanwhile, we are living into a larger story, the story of Christ Church.

The plots of all our individual stories and of our church story includes our experiences of and responses to pain. The poetry of a twentieth century American, Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), vibrates with pain. Roethke's father died when he was fifteen, and Roethke suffered from a bipolar disorder. Also, alcoholism afflicted him. His university teaching and writing careers were interspersed with periods of hospitalization for the bipolar disorder.

Roethke had a unique mode of autobiographical self-expression in which his keen self-awareness combined with a profound interaction with his world and an intense consciousness of the divine. His lyric style plus the frequent intrusion of the poet's "I" pull you into an emotionally charged lowering of boundaries. It is as if the reader enters that pain-framed world.

After one severe bipolar episode, he published a collection entitled *Words for the Wind* (1956), which is included now in his collected works. The poem "The Sententious Man" was in that collection and one strophe reads:

Is pain a promise? I was schooled in pain,  
And found out all I could of all desire;  
I weep for what I'm like when I'm alone  
In the deep center of the voice and fire.

[*The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Doubleday, 1966), p. 127.]

The writings of the psychiatrist Rollo May speak to an experience like Roethke's. His classic little book *The Courage to Create* [Norton, 1975] still is available. He says "courage is not the absence of despair; it is, rather, the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair" (p. 12). In another place, he observes that "genius and psychosis are so close to each other" (p. 28).

In his poem, "In a Dark Time," Roethke begins by saying: "In a dark time the eye begins to see;" (*Collected Poems*, p. 231). I find such encouragement in Roethke's example. Pain and insanity (each of us has some of both) can bring us to the edge where we encounter the divine and our own deepest selves and do our most creative living. As Roethke put it later in this same poem, "The edge is what I have."

Could it be that we will go deeper within ourselves, deeper into God, and deeper into relationship with each other in response to pain than in the experience of joy?

God's peace,

*David+*

Fr. David+, Interim Rector